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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Central Intelligence Bulletin

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^C 159
25 February 1967

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Approved For Release 2003/05/19 : CIA-RDP79T00975A009700080001-6

Approved For Release 2003/05/19 : CIA-RDP79T00975A009700080001-6

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India: The Congress Party continues to suffer reverses as the results of the national and state elections are slowly tabulated and announced.

Incomplete returns point toward a substantially reduced Congress majority in the lower house of the national parliament, where the party now holds 367 of the present 500 seats. There will be 520 elected seats in the new parliament. The chief beneficiaries from Congress' setbacks are the major right-wing opposition parties--the Hindu nationalist Jan Sangh and the conservative Swatantra. The two Communist parties also appear likely to increase their previously small representation. Even if the Congress majority is slim, however, the opposition in parliament will remain splintered.

The Congress Party has fared worse in the contests for seats in 16 state legislative assemblies, 15 of which had been controlled by Congress majorities. Final returns for the southern state of Kerala, which has been ruled directly from New Delhi since an indecisive election in 1965, reveal a landslide victory for the Communist-led electoral front. Neighboring Madras--until now a Congress stronghold--fell to an aggressive regional party. Congress has lost its majority in five other states, but may be able to form shaky coalition governments in some of these.

The upset defeats of a number of prominent Congress Party leaders have dealt a severe blow to the established organizational and power structure of the party. At least five cabinet ministers have been defeated, including the brilliant food minister, C. Subramaniam, and the powerful Bombay party boss and railway minister, S. K. Patil. The list of important Congress figures defeated also includes the party's president, treasurer, and secretary, as well as several state chief ministers.

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It is too early to tell if Congress will pull itself together in reaction to these setbacks, or whether the losses will exacerbate already serious factionalism. The returns so far indicate that the general trend toward preoccupation with regional and local interests, evident for some time before the elections, is likely to continue.

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El Salvador: [A government move against Communist-backed candidates in the 5 March presidential election may have forestalled a right-wing coup attempt.]

[Both the presidential and vice-presidential candidates of the Communist-backed Renovating Action Party (PAR) have been disqualified unless they can correct technical flaws in their registration documents by 28 February.]

[The government's action can be used to undercut charges of "softness on Communism" that right-wing military leaders have been spreading to justify their plan to overthrow the regime before the elections.]

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[The PAR has not yet canceled plans for a major election rally today, and any disorders will probably precipitate further government action.]

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NOTES

*Venezuela: Student activities at the Central University have been suspended indefinitely because of uncontrolled student agitation protesting the government's new university regulations. These limit university autonomy to academic matters and eliminate use of the campus as a sanctuary for terrorists and other criminals. Communist agitators among the students have been joined by Social Christian (COPEI) youth leaders in inciting demonstrations. While government officials hope to avoid violence, they have reinforced police units patrolling the periphery of the campus, and a clash appears increasingly likely.7

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